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A SAMPLING OF PACIFIC PORTS OF CALL

Ensenada

Hey, there's more to this town than it just being the finish line for the annual Newport-Ensenada Race! The City of Ensenada has completed a total renovation of Primera, the main street downtown. Enjoy a stroll down the cobblestone sidewalk complete with outdoor cafes, interesting shops, strolling musicians and street vendors. The malecon (harbor boardwalk) renovation was completed last year and provides a beautifully landscaped walk along the harbor front to the Ventana Del Mar Plaza with its huge Mexican flag. From there, you can look across the rio at the new small craft harbor nestled in the middle of the new cruise ship docks. It will be interesting to watch the progress on this new endeavor. The story is that in order to expand the cargo port on the north side of the harbor, the developers had to relocate the passenger ships' dock and provide some type of recreational asset for the city. It looks to be a good solution. Ensenada is also a swell place to take possession of your new boat (more on that later), get a new bottom job for your old boat or set as your destination for an extended coastal cruise, a fun weekend road trip or the start of some long distance cruising! The people of Ensenada are trying hard to improve their city, both for turistas, a big part of their income and for themselves and their families. We have seen improvements which are good, and yet some loss of the "Mexico-ness" in some of the tourist areas. We have met a lot of the residents and business people and want to thank them for their hospitality. As visitors, it is our obligation to live up to the Bienvenidos and the Mi Casa es Su Casa that have been extended to us.

Papeete

Papeete is the major city of Tahiti and the capital of French Polynesia. This little city of 80,000 people is pretty recent as there was no buildings on its site when in 1769, Captain Cook first reached the Matavai Bay located 10 km away on the East Coast. Since the 18th century, sailors realized how safe was its bay for their ships. In 1797, the London Missionary Society (LMS) tried to send some missionaries to settle down in Papeete but they did not succeed until 1824 with the help of Queen Pomare IV. It is Governor Bruat who decided in 1843 that Papeete would become the administrative center of the newly born French Protectorate. At that time, the expansion of the city was going fast and the bay of Papeete had become a large harbour. In the 19th century, some Chinese started to settle down in Papeete that counted only 5,000 persons. During World War I, Papeete was bombed by the Germans and the Municipal Market was destroyed.

Rangiroa

The atolls of Tahiti are some of the largest and most beautiful in the world. They are low-lying islands and are very different from the mountainous islands of Tahiti, Moorea and Bora Bora. All of the islands that make up the Tuamotu's are coral atolls. These coral rings surround a lagoon and offer some of the most beautiful colors and clear waters set against dramatic white sand beaches. Explore the islands by open-air cars or bicycles; discover the lagoon and surrounding motus by motorboat, canoe or sailboat. Rangiroa, the largest atoll in the South Pacific, is only an hour's flight from Tahiti. Its lagoon is 42 miles long and 16 miles wide, which is larger than the island of Tahiti. The total population of the island is about 1,400 people who live in two villages. These villages lie on opposite sides of a navigable pass that provides access to the lagoon from the open ocean beyond. It is one of these passes that provides one of Tahiti's best and most adventurous diving experiences, a drift dive teaming with Hammerhead sharks. This island also offers you one of the more unique hotel experiences, the Kia Ora Sauvage

Tokyo

Describing Tokyo to someone who has never been here is a formidable task. After all, how do you describe a city that--as one of my friends visiting Tokyo for the first time put it--seems like it's part of another planet? To be sure, Tokyo is very different from Western capitals, but what really sets it apart is its people. Approximately 12 million people reside within Tokyo's 1,200,000,000 sq. km (800 sq. miles), and almost one-fourth of Japan's total population lives within

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commuting distance of the city. This translates into a crush of humanity that packs the subways, crowds the sidewalks, and fills the department stores beyond belief. In some parts of the city, the streets are as crowded at 3am as they are at 3pm. With its high-energy, visual overload, Tokyo makes even New York seem like a sleepy, laid-back town. And yet, despite its limited space for harmonious living, Tokyo remains one of the safest cities in the world, with remarkably little crime or violence. No matter how lost I may become, I know that people will go out of their way to help me. Hardworking, honest, and helpful to strangers, the Japanese are their country's greatest asset. With Tokyo so densely packed, it comes as no shock to learn that land here is more valuable than gold and that buildings are built practically on top of each other, shaped like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle to fit the existing plots of real estate. More than perhaps any other city in the world, Japan's capital is a concrete jungle, with a few parks but not many trees to break the monotony, and it stretches on and on as far as the eye can see. Fires, earthquakes, wars, the zeal for modernization, and the price of land have taken their toll on the city, eradicating almost all evidence of previous centuries. It's as though Tokyo was born only this morning, with all the messy aftermath of a city conceived without plan and interested only in the future. Thus, first-time visitors to Tokyo are almost invariably disappointed. They come expecting an exotic Asian city, but instead find a megalopolis Westernized to the point of drabness. Used to the grand edifices and monuments of Western cities, they look in vain for Tokyo's own monuments to its past--ancient temples, exquisite gardens, imperial palaces, or whatever else they've imagined. Instead they find what may be, quite arguably, one of the ugliest cities in the world. So, while Tokyo is one of my favorite cities, it's an appreciation that came only with time. When I first moved here, I was tormented by the unsettling feeling that I was somehow missing out on the "real" Tokyo. Even though I was living and working here, Tokyo seemed beyond my grasp, elusive, vague, and undefined. I felt that the meaning of the city was out there somewhere, if only I knew where to look. With time, I finally learned that I needn't look farther than my own front window. Tokyo has no center, but rather is made up of a series of small towns and neighborhoods clustered together, each with its own history, flavor, and atmosphere. There are narrow residential streets, ma-and-pa shops, fruit stands, and stores. There's the neighborhood tofu factory, the lunch-box stand, grocery shop, and the tiny police station, where the cops know the residents by name and patrol the area by bicycle. There are carefully pruned bonsai trees gracing sidewalks, women in kimono bowing and shuffling down streets, and wooden homes on impossibly narrow streets. Walk in the old downtown neighborhoods of Asakusa or Yanaka and you're worlds apart from the trendy quarters of Harajuku or the high-rises of Shinjuku. Neighborhoods like these make Tokyo lovable and livable. What's more, once visitors get to know Tokyo better, they learn that you can't judge Tokyo by what it looks like on the outside, for this is a city of interiors. Even those concrete monsters may house interiors that are fascinating in design and innovation. In the basement of that drab building could well be a restaurant with wooden beams, mud walls, and thatched ceiling, imported intact from a farmhouse in the Japan Alps; on its roof could be a small Shinto shrine, while the top floor could house a high-tech bar or a sophisticated French restaurant. And beneath Tokyo's concrete shell is a thriving cultural life left very much intact. In fact, if you're interested in Japan's performing arts as well as such diverse activities as the tea ceremony or sumo, Tokyo is your best bet for offering the most at any one time. Tokyo is also rich in museums and claims the largest repository of Japanese art in the world. It also gets my vote as the pop-art capital of the world; if you're into kitsch, you'll be in high heaven. I can't imagine being bored here, even for just a minute.

Yokohama

Yokohama is often called the Garden City, though its name actually means "City by the Bay." Its waterfront area provides a port to the rest of the world as well as beautiful beaches. The waterfront district has unique arts galleries and boutiques and one of the largest Chinatown areas in Japan. Yokohama is the home of Japan's Central Baseball League and Japan's first coffee shop. There is even an indoor beach with sand and water and waves! The second largest city in Japan, Yokohama is home to 3 million people and is a growing, innovative business center. Its large, accessible port has made it Japan's largest international trading center. It certainly maintains its own identity and does not fall into the shadow of Tokyo, a mere 18.6 miles (30 kilometers) from Tokyo.